

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 1993

FOR THE DEPUTY SECRETARY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP (INGERSOLL, ROBERT S.), PINR, BU

SUBJECT: ZHIVKOV ON "BULGARIAN DEMOCRACY": SOME THOUGHTS ON
YOUR INTERVIEW WITH HIM

1. SINCE WE KNOW NEXT TO NOTHING ABOUT THE INNER WORKINGS OF THE BULGARIAN POLITBURO, IT IS HARD TO SAY TO WHAT EXTENT TODOR ZHIVKOV'S DECISIONS REQUIRE THE ASSENT OF HIS COLLEAGUES; BUT IT IS CERTAIN THAT HE IS FAR AND AWAY THE MOST POWERFUL MAN IN BULGARIA. (IT IS NOT QUITE CORRECT TO SAY OR IMPLY, AS YOUR BRIEFING PAPERS DO, THAT HE HAS BEEN IN FULL CONTROL HERE SINCE 1954. IT TOOK HIM A WHILE TO REMOVE THE OTHER CONTENDERS AFTER BECOMING PARTY FIRST SECRETARY, AND HIS LAST RIVAL WAS PURGED ONLY IN 1961.) UNDER HIS OUTWARDLY MODEST AND FOLKSY DEMEANOR THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF SHREWDNESS, ARROGANCE, AND MOST DANGEROUS, IGNORANCE OF WESTERN SYSTEMS AND VALUES.

2. IN THE LATTER CATEGORY I WOULD PLACE A STORY THAT HE HAS BEEN TELLING FOREIGNERS LATELY, AND WHICH HE MAY ALSO TRY ON YOU, ABOUT HOW HE EXPLAINED BULGARIAN DEMOCRACY TO A WESTERN JOURNALIST WHO HAD DOUBTED THAT THERE IS REAL DEMOCRACY HERE. HE SAID HE HAD TOLD THE JOURNALIST THAT IF HE, ZHIVKOV, WENT TO A COLLECTIVE FARM AND STARTED CRITICIZING COLLECTIVIZATION, THE COLLECTIVE FARMERS WOULD FIRST LAUGH, KNOWING HIM TO BE GIVEN TO JOKES.

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3. BUT IF HE PERSISTED IN DENIGRATING COLLECTIVE AGRICULTURE, ZHIVKOV WENT ON, AND IF THE COLLECTIVE FARMERS THOUGHT HE WAS SERIOUS ABOUT WANTING TO BRING BACK THE BAD OLD DAYS, THEY WOULD SET UPON HIM AND BEAT HIM UP. "AND THAT," HE SAID TRIUMPHANTLY AS IF IT WERE UNANSWERABLE, "IS BULGARIAN DEMOCRACY."

4. IT IS A VERY DANGEROUS THING TO HAVE NOBODY AROUND FOR SO MANY YEARS WHO WILL CONTRADICT ONE, AND IT WOULD IN MY OPINION DO NO HARM AT ALL IF YOU WERE TO REPLY THAT IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT IN ALL COMMUNIST COUNTRIES AGRICULTURE IS THE WEAKEST SECTOR AND MANY WOULD STARVE IF IT WERE NOT FOR THE PRIVATE PLOTS WHICH MAKE USE OF THE ELEMENTARY STRIVING OF PEOPLE TO HAVE THE FRUITS OF THEIR OWN LABOR.

5. WHILE THERE IS NO PROFIT IN ARGUING WITH A COMMUNIST ABOUT DEMOCRACY, THERE IS PROFIT IN MY OPINION IN MAKING QUITE SURE THAT A COMMUNIST INTERLOCUTOR UNDERSTANDS THAT WE ARE NOT TAKEN IN BY HIS PROPAGANDA. ZHIVKOV IS AN UNUSUALLY SMUG COMMUNIST BECAUSE HIS COUNTRY HAS BEEN MAKING GREAT ADVANCES DURING HIS RULE AND THERE HAS BEEN NO VISIBLE CHALLENGE TO HIS LEADERSHIP SINCE A RATHER OBSCURE ATTEMPT IN 1965.

6. IN MY JUDGMENT, BULGARIA'S COMMUNIST REGIME IS MORE FIRMLY ESTABLISHED AND BETTER ACCEPTED THAN ANY OTHER IN EASTERN EUROPE; BUT IT BEHAVES -- WITH RESPECT TO INTERCOURSE WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES, ESPECIALLY IN THE MATTER OF EXCHANGING INFORMATION AND IDEAS -- AS IF IT WERE A HOUSE OF CARDS THAT WOULD COLLAPSE UNDER THE FIRST GUST OF WIND.

7. INCIDENTALLY, ZHIVKOV ALSO LIKES TO CLAIM THAT IT IS NOT BULGARIA THAT IS BEHIND AN IRON CURTAIN BUT CERTAIN WESTERN COUNTRIES. HE WILL PROBABLY SAY THAT OUR GOODS ARE NOT DISCRIMINATED AGAINST, WHEREAS BULGARIAN GOODS SUFFER DISCRIMINATION FROM US; THAT ANY AMERICAN CAN COME TO BULGARIA WITHOUT A VISA (IF HE IS A TOURIST), BUT BULGARIANS HAVE TO WAIT WEEKS FOR VISAS TO THE US; AND

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THAT IT IS THE US THAT HAS BEEN RELUCTANT TO HAVE EXCHANGES WITH BULGARIA.

8. THE KIND OF EXCHANGES HE HAS IN MIND, OF COURSE, ARE THOSE THAT HIS GOVERNMENT CAN RIGIDLY CONTROL, AND FROM WHICH HE SEES AN IMMEDIATE PAY-OFF: I.E. TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER. WHEN IT COMES TO BULGARIAN "DEMOCRACY", THE GOB LEADERSHIP MAY FEEL FREE FROM ANY IMMEDIATE

CHALLENGE BUT THEY STILL SPEND CONSIDERABLE AMOUNTS
OF MONEY TO JAM RADIO FREE EUROPE AND YOU CANNOT BUY
A LESTERN NON-COMMUNIST NEWSPAPER ANYWHERE IN BULGARIA
(WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ONE COPY OF LE MONDE AT THE
SOFIA GRAND HOTEL WHICH IS LENT TO PERSONS WHO CAN
PROVE THEY ARE FOREIGN TOURISTS).

9. WE HAVE PREPARED TALKING POINTS ON FREER CIRCULATION
OF IDEAS, LINKED TO THE FINAL ACT OF CSCE. WHILE WE
SEE LITTLE GOOD IN A FULL-DRESS DEBATE WITH ZHIVKOV,
WE DO BELIEVE IT MUCH IN OUR INTEREST TO SAY WE FULLY
EXPECT BULGARIA WILL NOW TAKEN CONCRETE STEPS TO ALLOW,
INDEED PROMOTE, THE INTERCHANGE OF PEOPLE, PUBLICATIONS
AND IDEAS CALLED FOR IN THE ACT OF HELSINKI -- AND
THAT THIS CAN HARDLY BE DISTURBING TO A GOVERNMENT SURE
OF ITSELF AND ITS PEOPLE.
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